

IN THE CLAIMS:

Kindly cancel claims 1-6 without prejudice or admission and add new claims 7-17 as shown in the following listing of claims, which replaces all previous versions and listings of claims in the captioned application.

1. - 6. (canceled).

7. (new) A method of depositing a thin film extending laterally outward from an edge of a sample comprising the steps of:

irradiating a focused ion beam onto a sample proximate the edge thereof while injecting a film-forming gas to deposit a thin film on a narrow region at the edge of the sample; and

sequentially shifting the focused ion beam in a direction extending outward from the edge of the sample to cause the thin film to grow laterally outward from the edge of the sample, a timing of the shifting of the focused ion beam being coincident with formation of a sloped surface on a side of the deposited film.

8. (new) A method of depositing a thin film according to claim 7; further comprising the step of depositing another film on the thin film to achieve a desired thickness.

9. (new) A method of depositing a thin film according to claim 7; wherein the edge of the sample is an edge of an opening formed in the sample, and the thin film is deposited to extend over the opening.

10. (new) A method of depositing a thin film according to claim 9; wherein the thin film is a bridge film having no supporting structure thereunder beyond the edge of the opening.

11. (new) A method of depositing a thin film according to claim 7; wherein the thin film has no supporting structure thereunder beyond the edge of the sample.

12. (new) A method of depositing a thin film according to claim 7; wherein the thin film has a relatively flat upper surface.

13. (new) A method of forming a bridge film extending across opposite ends of an opening in a sample, comprising the steps of:

irradiating a focused ion beam onto opposite ends of an opening in a sample while injecting a film-forming gas to deposit thin films on a narrow regions at the opposite ends of the opening; and

sequentially shifting the focused ion beam toward a center of the opening to cause the respective thin films to

grow in a direction extending from the opposite ends of the opening toward the center of the opening, a timing of the shifting of the focused ion beam being coincident with formation of a sloped surface on a side of the deposited thin films.

14. (new) A method of forming a bridge film according to claim 13; further comprising the step of joining the deposited thin films at a central section of the opening.

15. (new) A method of forming a bridge film according to claim 13; further comprising the step of depositing another film over the bridge film to achieve a desired thickness.

16. (new) A method of forming a bridge film according to claim 13; wherein the bridge film has no supporting structure thereunder between the opposite ends of the opening.

17. (new) A method of forming a bridge film according to claim 13; wherein the bridge film has a relatively flat upper surface.